Dhaka, Saturday, April 8, 2000

### Hijacker of a Plane vs Hijacker of a Govt

THE story of Pakistan today is the story of two men - former elected Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif and the current CEO of Pakistan General Pervez Musharraf. In our eyes one is the hijacker of a plane and the other is a hijacker of a constitutional government. Yes, it was the court that ultimately passed the sentence but that does not alter the fact that it was a military government - whose own legality is, and must be, in serious question that prosecuted the head of an elected government of Pakistan. As far as we are concerned this court made a mockery of the judicial process by focusing on a relatively small event and ignoring the far graver crime of overthrow of a constitutional government. Yes, the passengers of the plane were exposed to danger by Sharif's action but nothing actually happened to them. On the contrary look what happened due to the action of the army -Pakistan lost democracy. Who is a greater culprit, the hijacker of a plane whose passengers ultimately suffered no harm, or the hijacker of a legitimate government due to whose action the people of Pakistan have to suffer dictatorship and illegal army rule?

Pakistan's military has always been self-serving, and the present take-over proves it again. What after all triggered the present take-over by the Pakistan military? It was the dismissal of the Chief of Staff, General Pervez Musharraf. Does the Constitution of Pakistan grant the elected Prime Minister of Pakistan to dismiss the Chief of Staff? If yes, then Nawaz Sharif was perfectly within his right to take the action that he did. It could have been ill conceived but it was neither illegal nor unconstitutional. Just because the army did not like this decision, what did it do? It toppled an elected government. Whether Nawaz Sharif had become unpopular and as such deserved to be removed from power is a judgement that only the people of Pakistan can make and NOT the army.

So for us this judicial process begs the most fundamental question as to who should be trying whom. In a technical sense Sharif did commit an unlawful act by ordering a passenger plane not to be allowed to land in Pakistan, especially when it was running short of fuel. But a far greater unlawful act has been committed in the form of overthrowing an elected government by the very general who is now trying Sharif.

#### **Poor Fire Victims**

TOW many people of this bulging metropolis are I shanty-dwellers? The answer may not be easy to get, but no one will contest that a large number of the 7.5 million city dwellers live in sub-human conditions at the slums. Slums are mostly raised on public land by the mastaans and godfathers of the areas in collaboration with a class of dishonest public servants. These are rented out to the migrating people who normally form the backbone of the workforce for the citizens of the metropolis and also keep the machines of the export-oriented industry whining away day in and day out. The vast majority of garments workers, rickshawpullers, vendors, shopowners in the kitchen market, pushcart drivers, masons and carpenters live there, may be, alongside some drug dealers and petty thieves.

The recent incidents of fire breaking out at some big slums rendered thousands of poor people homeless. These tend to show a vicious pattern of greed of a certain quarter for grabbing public land. The victims of these fire 'incidents' have described definite characteristics of expropriation. The latest incident at Begunbari slum in Tejgaon is no exception. The plight and human misery suffered by the inmates cannot be measured in monetary terms. While sympathising with the victims we are afraid that many other slums may fall prey to the machinations of these despicable land-grabbing hounds.

We strongly demand that the government form a judicial inquiry committee to probe the matter thoroughly and bring the culprits to book.

#### End of an Era

A N era ended on Wednesday with the death of Rabindra Sangeet's 'Mohor'. She had been ill for the last three months and her condition deteriorated since Friday last before she went into coma. We express our deepest condolences at the demise of this institution of a Rabindra Sangeet proponent. Born in 1925 at Santiniketan, she stayed there all through her life. Although she preferred the countryside, it was the city, Calcutta, where she breathed her last. Kanika's association with Rabindra Sangeet dates back to her early days. She impressed no less a person than Rabindranath Tagore with two renditions of his songs. The quality of her voice was such that Rabindranath wrote two songs especially for her and renamed her Kanika from Anima.

The legend that she had become was because of her special style of singing. The Kanika Bandopadhaya éclat inspired many to get into the singing line. Many Rabindra Sangeet artistes in Bangladesh have their 'Mohor-di' to thank for their achievements. She visited Bangladesh, sang here and even taught some, a song or two they will remember as long as they live. She was attuned with the Bangladeshi lifestyle and felt at home here. It is our great fortune that a songstress of her stature has left her imprints on many in Bangladesh.

The responsibility is now upon those in Bangladesh who were Kanika Bandopadhaya's direct students to be her torch-bearers. She is no longer here, but she must not be forgotten. It is their duty to make sure that Kanika Bandopadhaya remains a star in our cultural firmament. We mourn her death and we hope that we can pay her the tribute she deserves by upholding Rabindra Sangeet in its pristine form.

## For a Safer World: Alternative Voices

by Adilur Rahman Khan

The only way to save the people of volatile regions is to immediately build a people to people communication system at all levels and declare an all out movement against a) Militarism b) Communalism c) Caste System and d) Poverty. Since the enemies of the people are the friends of the power mongers, the alliance of the people need to develop a popular mechanism to frustrate anti-people technologies for a nuclear free world.

tries have enhanced conventional war machinery, increased the size of their armed forces and procured hi-tech weapons. Even worse, two of them — India and Pakistan dependently alone took care of have developed, and subsequently tested, their ballistic missiles and nuclear capabili-The nature and magnitude of

militarisation can be understood from the defence expenditures of these countries. Pakistan has recently shelved its earlier plans for downsizing military whereas India's new BJP Government is expected to hike its defence spending by about US\$ 1.8 billion. In both these countries the army is reported to be the largest beneficiary, enjoying a significant chunk of the budgetary increase in order to fund the local manufacture of war machines as well as higher allowances for the armed forces. It must be noted here that this is a region where most of the people live well below the poverty line and health and sanitation facilities are grossly inadequate.

INCE the 1970s, the South

shown a growing trend to-

wards militarisation. Despite

widespread poverty, these coun-

Asian countries have

"South Asia remains a region divided — between the ambitions of the rich and the despair of the poor. A region where the richest one-fifth earn almost forty per cent of the income, and the poorest one-fifth make do with less than ten per cent. A region where today begins with the struggle for survival for 515 million povertyridden destitutes, and tomorrow threatens the future of 395 million illiterate adults. Where women are often denied basic human rights and minorities continue their struggle against prejudice and discrimination." (Mahbub Ul Huq, Human Development in South Asia 1999)

#### **Blind Eye Towards** Mishaps

Different reports suggest that neither India nor Pakistan has so far taken any effective precaution against any possible nuclear accident. Various inside reports suggest that insuf- sive human miseries many ficient safety manuals may times. The Partition of 1947 cause accidents similar to one generated a situation of mass that occurred in a uranium pro- exodus for both the states of Incessing plant in Japan last dia and Pakistan. Political demonth.

ishna, former Chief of the their religious identity could Atomic Energy Regulatory not bring peace. People of this Board (AERB) of India, "exces- region have proceeded to assert sive secrecy in Department of their ethnic identity but only Atomic Energy (DAE) and in- the people of then East Pak-

the safety of nuclear installations in India". He further added, "with a captive AERB identity. from which the DAE can in effect withhold information as they wish, coupled with the

shelter the DAE enjoys through invoking the national security bogey and the official secrets Act, we are likely to face a serious nuclear accident in the not too distant future" Reports suggest that India

has had two close calls of nuclear accidents — one in 1979. when primary coolant pipes in Tarapur reactor burst and the other one in 1993, where the explosion of leaking hydrogen blew up the turbine building of the atomic plant at Narora and the resulting power blackout stopped the coolant pump.

Similar accidents may occur at any time also in Pakistan. Mr. Zia Mian, in one of his recent articles has given some examples. The Pakistan Atomic garding possible accidents which may occur at Chashma Nuclear Power Plant. The major concern is that the plant, scheduled to be made ready to produce power by the end of March 2000, is located in an area which is very much earthquake prone and furthermore, the plant's reactor sits on the banks of the Indus river, which will automatically endanger the surrounding ecosystem, that is dependent on the flow of this river, in the event of any major accident resulting from

#### **Human Rights Under** Siege

an earthquake.

South Asia being the home of a large population, many of whom live below the poverty line, has already suffered mascision for the resettlement of According to Mr. Gopala Kr- human beings on the basis of ability of AERB to function in- istan have successfully secured

a country of their own named Bangladesh, which is predominantly based on their ethnic.

Bangladesh, being the first country of this region almost entirely populated by people of same ethnic origin, has inspired other nations of South Asia to raise their issues of national identity and the questions of their right to self determination at the appropriate levels. But the militaristic response to their struggles for the right to self-determination has given rise to human rights abuses in one hand and increased the flow of refugees on

"South Asia is one of the most militarised regions in the world; it is also one of the poorest. Yet South Asian Governments continue to redirect scarce resources towards building new weapons of mass destruction. Such non-productive investments, in the name of Indira Gandhi, the former Energy Commission appears to of national security, are taking Prime Minister of India more be indifferent to the concerns a high toll on human security than three thousand members shown by different quarters re- while people's lives, the means as well as the ends of all development concerns, are left un-

> The Jammu and Kashmir Public Disruptive Activities (Prevention) Act, the Disturbed Areas Act, the Armed Forces Special Powers Act of 1958 of India, the Prevention of Anti National Activities Act, 1974 of Pakistan, the Special Powers Act of 1974 of Bangladesh, the Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act of 1979 of Sri Lanka are all aimed against political opponents or the people who are trying to defend their rights against the repressive systems or political set-ups in Kashmir, Punjab, North-east, Sindh, Chittagong Hill Tracts and Jaffna. The option for militaristic solutions for ethnic, religious, caste and environmental problems has generated a situation of conflict

and total insecurity. Internal issues have become the issues of more than one state of the region. The struggle for self-determination of the people of Kashmir has now become the common burning issue for the states of India and Pakistan. Armed conflicts in Chittagong Hill Tracts, Northeast of India and the Tamil is-

sue in Sri Lanka have already homeland. contributed to pushing refugees on the other side of the international borders. The Tamil-Sinhala dispute in Sri Lanka has already once caused Indian military presence in the island without any solution to the very basic issue. Communalism and communal attacks on people belonging to the religious minority communities have increased very much in the recent

more fuel to the fire. India was put into a situation of communal riots again. Thousands of people belonging to the minority Muslim community were killed and properties belonging to Muslims were destroyed. The religious fanatics like Shiv Sena, RSS and other members of the Sangh Parivar were militantly active in all these attacks. After the assassination of the minority Sikh Community were assassinated. Just before and after the recent general election in India, whereby the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) returned to power, the minority Christians were the new targets and continue to be so. Different state governments of India led by BJP are coming forward with their different agenda, which, if implemented, will essentially violate the

rights of religious minorities. In Pakistan, the minority Christian, Hindu and Ahmadiya sect of Muslims are facing attacks almost every day. Even the attempt of the previous Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, to introduce Sharia Law was in fact designed to bring people belonging to the religious minority groups down to a subservient level.

In Bangladesh the Vested and Non-Resident Property Act of 1974 has already contributed in taking away property from people belonging to the minority Hindu community. Apart from this, whenever there has been a communal riot in India, members of the minority Hindu community in Bangladesh have been made vulnerable targets by the religious fanatics and the successive Governments have done little to punish the insti-

The Tamil separatist movement led by LTTE has already displaced many thousand liberal Tamils and Muslims from LTTE controlled areas and pushed them towards southwestern part of Sri Lanka.

South Asia which has either given birth or has acted as host to all the major religions of the world, has unfortunately been put in a situation of religious confrontation by religious fanatics and fascist groups who operate in different countries of the region. Moreover, the states are acting in such a chauvinistic way, that only people belonging to the majority community will be the sole beneficiaries of the state, thereby making the minorities second class citizens in their own

Human Rights violations under the caste system and organized violence of armed groups belonging to the upper

castes have also increased in the recent years. Attacks on people belonging to the lower caste group in the Indian states of Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Andhra have increased. In recent years, in Bihar alone, killings by Ranabir Sena (armed group belonging to The destruction of Babri the upper caste) have been re-Mosque in Ayodhya, has added ported in the major newspapers of India. Children are also under constant threat of violence and persecution by armed religious fanatics and vigilantes supported by the establishment Burning of widows and dowry killings, although banned, have occasionally and secretly taken place in different parts of India, while incidents of honour killings have been reported from Pakistan. The crimes of bonded labour and trafficking in women and

children cannot be ignored. Along with all these major human rights abuses, poverty is the greatest concern of all and the reason for many of the abuses. South Asia houses the largest concentration of the poverty stricken population of the world. In the name of democracy, 'family' control over political parties and political institutions have made the practice of democracy a joke. In India, Pakistan, Bangladesh alone, the various political 'dynasties' - Nehru, Bhutto, Mujib and Zia, have made party politics and power a thing to be inherited on the death of the leader. Absence of actual participation of the people in decision making processes and lack of participatory approach at the grassroots level has made democracy inoperative. Everything is done in this region from the top. Criminalisation of politics and bad governance have made mockery of the term democracy.

#### The International 'Nuclear Club'

In the international level, in 1945 the world witnessed the dropping of atom bombs on two Japanese towns, Hiroshima and Nagasaki by the United States which at the expense of so many men, women and children has become a superpower and has also become one of the founders of United Nations by declaring itself as one of its five permanent members. Other four permanent members of UN potential for ultimate evil - the followed the same path by building, testing and developing

their own nuclear arsenal. Gradually many industrialised and 'third world' countries, including India and Pakistan, opted for nuclearisation. Many western countries including Germany, Sweden, Canada contributed in the development of nuclear capability in third world countries for sheer business interest, at the expense of the well-being of the third world citizens. Moreover, they agriculture and natural re- rights.

sources of many other Southern countries, which are politically and technologically not equipped to resist the nuclear aggression of these western su-

People of Polynesian islands have protested for long against all kinds of nuclear testing in their Pacific region, which are particularly carried out by the United States and France. In the name of fertilizer or by giving bribes to some corrupt third world governments, nuclear wastes have been transported or have been attempted to be transported to the third world countries of Africa and Asia. People of Ronchlap and Three Miles Islands are still knocking at the doors of the US courts for compensation against loss of livelihood, their exposure to radiation and the destruction of their home and environment due to nuclear tests done by the government of United States in 1954 and 1979. Flora, fauna and marine lives are also deeply affected by continued nuclear tests by the western su-

The recent entry of India and Pakistan into the nuclear club has made the situation worse. "Since 1990, the alarming developments in India's and Pakistan's nuclear and ballistic missile programmes have further threatened to undermine the region's stability. Rather than strengthening each country's national security, full nuclearisation and new missile tests have upset the ability of conventional forces to provide adequate territorial defence, and have eroded the relatively safer non-weaponised nuclear deterrent on the subcontinent. A nuclear sword perilously hangs over the more than one billion people of South Asia." Being in such a situation they have every potentiality to transform the South Asian region into a highly sensitive conflict zone. This has already been, to some extent, dressrehearsed during the Kargil conflict last year.

#### Conclusion

The only way to save the passengers of this sinking vessel is to immediately build a people to people communication system at all levels and declare an all out movement against the four enemies of a civil society: a) Militarism b) Communalism c) Caste System and d) Poverty.

Since the enemies of the people are the friends of the power mongers, the alliance of the people need to develop a popular mechanism to frustrate and end nuclear and anti-people technologies for a nuclear free world. To quote a section from Human Development in South Asia, 1999, published by the Mahbub ul Huq Human Development Centre. "The use of nuclear weapons, with their mass annihilation of innocent civilians and environment will become a distant possibility when a concerned and knowledgeable global civil society demands from 'governments' the complete abolition of these armaments

The author is a lawyer practicing in the High Court Division of the Supreme Court of Bangladesh and a member of have polluted the environment, Odhikar, a coalition for human

and the establishment of a new

global regulatory framework."

# on Political Merry-go-round

Nepal

Although a new Prime Minister has taken up the reins in Nepal, he is an old face facing old problems. For ordinary Nepalis, the question is whether he will tackle the economic drift and Maoist insurgency that are holding back development. Gemini News Service looks at the implications of the changing of the guard.

Familiar Face Comes Around

#### Jan Sharma writes from Kathmandu

the government changes hands for the I Litenth time in as many years, Nepalis are left wondering whether this was what they wanted when they turned out in large numbers on the streets in the early 1990s to press King Birendra for multi-party

A decade on, hopes for an end to political uncertainty look slim. And frustrations are running so high that a small group took to the streets recently, urging King Birendra to stage a Pakistan-style coup.

The main beneficiaries of democracy appear to be members of Kathmandu's militarybureaucratic elite — whichever party forms the government, they remain in power and continue to receive their salaries and perks. The net losers are ordinary people, who enjoy the freedom to complain but find that no-one seems to be listen-

Many here are worried that the country is turning into a new South Asian 'basket case', even as Bangladesh — accorded the insulting epithet by a former United States Secretary of State, Henry Kissinger — shows signs of economic progress. The elusive political stability typifled by the March departure of 76-year-old Prime Minister Krishna Prasad Bhattarai and the late March installation of Girija Prasad Koirala, also 76, has hampered the implementation of free market economic re-

When in power, all political parties want reforms to please the World Bank and other major donors; back in opposition, they criticise the donors for exerting pressure for policy re-

Reforms are supposed to create income and job opportunities, but can cause short-term pain. So it is easier for officials to do nothing rather than risk upsetting interest groups. Bureaucratic lethargy and indecision have become endemic.

The privatisation of several state-owned corporations, such as the Nepal Tea Development Corporation, has been delayed.

Business confidence is low, and investments in new projects are shelved. The blocked pipeline includes important schemes for drinking water, hydropower development and irrigation.

The economy is expected to grow at six per cent during 1999-2000 — up from an average of 3.6 per cent in the last five years - but this is more the result of good weather for farming than of government initiatives. The gap between government

earnings and expenditure is

Pop: 23m Area: 147,000 sq km GNP per head: \$210 Life expectancy: 58(m) 57(f) Adult literacy: 56%(m) 21%(f) Krishna Prasad Bhattarai (left) and NEPAL Girija Prasad Koirala (right) Dhangadi Pokhara CHINA **⊘**Kathmandu

growing, made larger by the allocation of additional funds for the fight against armed Maoist rebels, who are now active in 55 of the country's 75 districts. They have called for an "armed shutdown" in the kingdom in early April

More than 1,200 people have been killed in the four-year insurgency in the western hills, and several thousand villagers have migrated to towns to escape the insecurity and look for

So Prime Minister Koirala "The maintenance of law

has a lot on his hands. and order will be my top priority followed by control of corruption and strengthening of the civil service," he said on taking office. "These three areas are in a poor shape. They de-

serve top priority. Few disagree. But he said much the same in three previous stints in office, with few re-

He won another turn in the top job after 69 MPs, including 11 ministers, from Bhattarai's Nepali Congress party humiliatingly said they had lost confidence in Bhattarai's leadership as a result of his poor performance since taking office in May 1999

Now, Koirala's experienced and respected Finance Minister, Mahesh Acharya, will have to burn the midnight oil in readiness for the important 17-19 April meeting of the Nepal Development Forum, which groups all the country's main

The meeting has been repeatedly postponed since the

tion has resulted in confusion over government and donor priorities. Donors, for example, favour investment in social sectors, while the government prefers roads, power and infrastructure.

Despite the size of the problems facing him, Koirala's biggest threat could come from within his own party. He beat former premier Sher Bahadur Deuba in a party leadership vote in mid-March and he will have to keep a careful watch on party dissidents to keep himself

again be a contender for the leadership at a later date, but he, too, has to keep a wary eye on up-and-coming newcomers. They include Sujata Koirala, the ambitious and charming daughter of the new Premier.

She heads a non-governmental organisation, the Shushma Memorial Trust, and is active in community development work. If she pursues the political career in which she has expressed an interest she will be keeping up an extraordi nary family tradition. The Koirala family has pro-

duced three prime ministers. M P Koirala was the first commoner to become Prime Minister; B P Koirala, more respected | fence of his beliefs he used his lifte. His writings combined elas a novelist than as a politician, was ousted by King Mahendra, the present monarch's would rather lose his party many of his short stories origifather, in a royal coup in 1960; and G P Koirala has been at the helm on and off since 1991. The his own role in party politics. his imagination. His story of a three brothers had the same

father but different mothers. The author is the former edi- ation of Pakistan, a homeland official's honesty triumphed tor of 'The Independent' in for the Muslims who suffered over temptation was the theme Kathmandu. He now reports for discrimination. In the newly of another of his memorable last get-together in 1996. Funds have continued to arrive but the 'Asia Wall Street Journal' created state of Pakistan he was stories. The official, a refugee in lack of dialogue and coordina- and 'Khaleej Times.

## Lest We Forget

## M A Mohaimen: Blend of Courage and Conscience

by Tabarak Husain

HE grief shared by us all who knew him at his passing away was the best tribute we could pay to M A Mohaimen. His was a life full of spirit, busy with works in which he always sought to do something meaningful to benefit humanity.

In a material sense he achieved much success. This was not the bequest of inheritance. It was the just reward of his persevering efforts, reinforced by a keen perception of judging business affairs. Press and publications, his primary arena of business, proved for him to be intellectually satisfying, besides bringing repute and material benefits. His relentless activities ex-

acted a price through affecting his health. Though the nature of his affliction remained a Deuba himself will certainly persistent threat, the pace of his work, largely in social and intellectual fields, continued unabated. His habit of moving around the city to see his friends and well-wishers was characterised by continued renewal of his pledge of loyalty to

haimen should begin with a reffriends. In short, it was courage dictated by conscience. In depowerful pen and devoted much ements of realism and human of his time and resources. He compassion. It was known that than his faith.

disenchanted with the narrow communal politics of the Muslim League leaders and disassociated himself from that party. He found the progressive, secular ideals of the Awami League more in line with his beliefs. He played a significant role in the Language Movement and the Liberation Struggle.



Mr. Mohaimen was however disillusioned by the trend of policies and events in post-liberation Bangladesh and publicly voiced his criticism. In his Any testimonial to Mr Mo- writings he exposed the pretensions and hypocrisy of some erence to his remarkable old-timer politicians. He ascourage. It was a courage which sessed with objectivity many admitted no hesitation in ex- events of the liberation struggle. posing injustice, it was a These actions drew criticism by courage to act in defiance of fear some and evoked admiration of of consequences, it was a others. He continued to remain courage to publicly admonish unaffected by all this. His and if necessary, to part with alienation from the party was unavoidable.

As a writer he was quite pronated from his personal experi-This was well-illustrated by ence and were not figments of As a Muslim Leaguer he worked cat, meeting a bizarre end, was for the movement for the cre- quite unforgettable. How a poor

1948 from UP in India, refused Mr Mohaimen's friend's offer of financial assistance in exchange for a small favour. The official explained that while migrating from UP he had lost everything. Only his "Iman" remained. He could never sacrifice it. There was a touching poignancy in the ever so simple

a human reaction. One of Mr Mohaimen's last writings was on the role of Mr Mohd Ali Jinnah, founder of Pakistan, in Indian politics. Mr Mohaimen explained that one of the reasons for his decision to write about Mr Jinnah - a staunch Congressman for many years but later disillusioned was that in recent years there has been re-evaluation of Mr Jinnah's role in the Indian press and publications.

With a broad and liberal outlook, Mr Mohaimen combined a strong sense of nationalism. There were numerous occasions in meetings and seminars when he strongly defended the interests of Bangladesh. He was, for example, much troubled by and even resentful about the discrimination by traders in Calcutta against Bangladesh books and publications.

It was a great misfortune that Mr Mohaimen's life was cut short before the society and the country could benefit from the full potential of his contributions. His bold and outspoken views on the ills of society and politics were a beacon of hope. He was deeply distressed by the dishonest and self-serving politics in the country. In his last years he moved away from active participation in politics and devoted himself to writing and discussing with a view to rousing public consciousness about the evils that beset our society. We mourn his loss and pray that his soul rests

in eternal peace. The writer is a former Foreign Secretary.